

Dayna is Queensland's first TSDX dog



On a pleasant September evening in 2011, Mrs Annette Kirkwood with her lovely Red & White Setter, Dayna – Dual Ch (T) Tintookie Spice Girl TSD ADM JDM SPDM GDX SDX ET – became the first pair to be awarded Australia's highest Tracking title "Track & Search Dog Excellent" in Queensland. This was their first attempt at the 6, following success the previous weekend on their 5 judged by Ron Jackson in Rockhampton.

The test was conducted by Evergreen T.C., and I had the pleasure of judging the event. The track commenced inside St. Paul's College grounds at Bald Hills on Brisbane's northside just after dark, before heading out the back gate into suburbia. The track utilised an assortment of buildings, roads, footpaths, and green space for 800 metres with five changes of direction.

Being our first urban/evening track, there was much to be taken into consideration. My thanks go to the team who helped put this together, and particularly Debby Lamprecht who also stewarded the track.

The previous Saturday evening, a group of us explored the area to determine the route to be used. We had to consider the safety aspects, including potential hazards such as loose dogs; the amount of traffic on individual streets; and a safe "hide" for the tracklayer. Once we had the route figured, we took dogs for a walk through the area to ascertain where potential problem dogs might

live. As it turned out we didn't find any, but we saw dozens of cats. We imagined Dayna having a ball on this track!

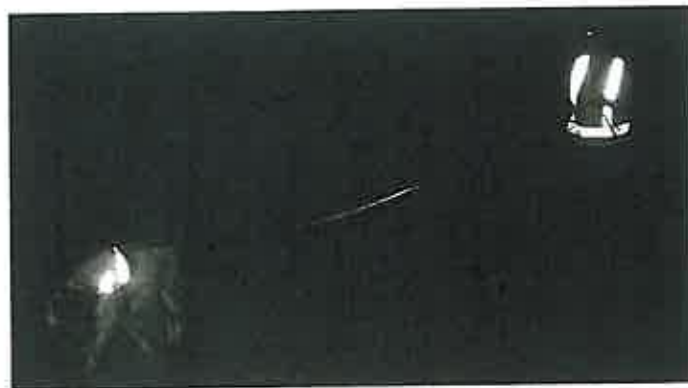
The rules require that local residents receive notification of an approved test being conducted in their area, and Debby made sure it included a note about keeping pets contained. This seemed to work as the cats were nowhere to be seen on the night.

Other considerations were to the use of safety stewards. Colin Fraine our tracklayer began laying the scent trail at 3:30pm. For his safety, he was followed by safety vehicles as he walked the route, and once he arrived at the park bench which was to be his "hide", he was collected and taken back to the College. Another safety steward, Neale Bickerton, would later walk just behind and to the side of the handler as the dog worked, with the judge and steward further back. It was Neale's job to alert the handler to hazards or danger. As simple as this all sounds, it took a lot of discussion and consideration of various contingencies, before we were satisfied that all bases had been covered. It mostly went to plan, although there were lessons to be learnt.

At 6pm we all met at the College again to run the test. A safety vehicle took Colin back to the hide, and remained in close proximity to him as he waited for the dog to find him. We all donned our reflective safety gear, two-way radios, and Dayna was readied with a reflective harness and lead. The handler wore a headlamp. At 6:30pm the test began.

The track started at a bench seat set amongst shrubs in between a couple of teaching blocks. What hadn't been considered was the amount of

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lighting that would be available at night (*Lesson #1*). The dog was given the start article in total darkness – the surrounding buildings blocking out any light. Tentatively Dayna worked her start, then began to walk up a ramp to classrooms but the handler gently restrained her, so Dayna returned to ground and followed scent that had drifted along the outside of the verandah (she had been correct – the tracklayer had walked up the ramp and along the verandah). Dayna then picked up a stronger scent (where the track layer had walked down a set of stairs at the other end) and followed the track across the oval, before turning left along a concrete pathway for around 140m and then crossing onto the oval again briefly to the left of the gate. However, the scent line and a right hand turn were actually to the right of the gate in a clearway. Once she realised this and changed direction she walked straight into a chain strung between two fence posts, which we couldn't see, and obviously neither could she! *Lesson #2* – check the headlamp batteries. Fortunately we had a torch with us, and were able to help handler and dog to negotiate this obstacle.

Once we got out into the back street Dayna really switched on. The track here ran along a well grassed footpath for about 100m. Cars going up and down since the track was laid must have blown the scent around, as the dog searched both sides of the road to pick up clues. Here the safety steward's presence was vital, to alert the handler to cars (albeit only a couple) that went by, and also to alert drivers to the dog. Once around the corner Dayna began paying fair attention to gateways, possibly again due to the movement of scent by passing traffic. But she was right on the money. She even crossed one road at precisely the correct spot (this is impressive - on a 3hr old scent laid on hot bitumen, and driven over by any number of cars since the track was put down).

After her second road crossing the track followed a concrete footpath along her second last leg. One more corner to go, and this one was on bitumen in a quiet, leafy back street. Then she appeared to run out of scent. The handler encouraged her to find the track again, working her on both sides of the street and back towards where she'd lost the scent. Dayna tried – she went into the gardens on either side, and back and forth. Eventually she found an entry to an easement which was almost impossible to see in the dark as the neighbours had planted hedges down both sides. Once she was confident to go up this narrow laneway, she charged on through, and then into the little park where she found Colin. There was much joy from everyone over this successful finish, and I daresay Dayna was rather pleased with herself too. She earned a Very Good.

More lessons: all the stewards described in the rules really are essential. The safety steward who walks with the competitor needs to know the track otherwise there could be safety issues, especially in low light. Drivers of safety vehicles reported that some safety gear did not react to headlights as it should, so proper safety-wear is essential. We also appreciated why there are no articles on the night tracks – the judge would have been lucky to see any indication by the dog, and if the dog hadn't had white markings, the spectators following behind would have seen nothing at all.

We all enjoyed this experience immensely, and were very pleased to be part of this special occasion. Annette wishes to thank her regular training partners for all their assistance in reaching this goal: Sandy Pitcher, Ian & Leanne McKeague, Megan Grieve, and Graeme & Frazer Baker all from Rocky. Thank you also to the fantastic Evergreen team, and to Annette Dobson who contributed much of this article.

~ Deb Sunners.

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